



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Steve Silverman

For Immediate Release

March 22, 2004

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Silverman Proposes Recycling Initiatives to Address Solid Waste Crisis

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Council President Steve Silverman today proposed two significant recycling initiatives: a ban on the disposal of cardboard by residents and businesses – the first in the region – and the full roll out of a successful residential recycling pilot program which would distribute over 100,000 large capacity, wheeled containers for residential recycling, almost five times the amount currently in use.

“Our recycling rate has been stagnant at 37% for the past few years. This is bad for the environment, and bad for our budget,” said Silverman. “The incinerator is running at capacity, and the transfer station isn’t far behind; both will require major capital solutions unless we get serious about recycling.”

With the exception of food waste, cardboard has been shown to comprise the largest percentage of the county waste stream (10%). Recycling all of that cardboard instead, could alone push the recycling rate up to 41%. A high degree of voluntary compliance is expected. However the ban would be enforced through inspection of loads delivered to the transfer station, and the assessment of penalties for non-compliance. *The county would not be inspecting individual bags of garbage.*

Anne Ambler, Chair of the Montgomery County Sierra Club Group said, “The Sierra Club strongly supports banning recyclable materials such as cardboard from disposal by incineration or

landfilling. I am greatly encouraged by Council President Silverman's effort to increase our recycling rate and look forward to commitment on the part of both the Council and the County Executive to the active enforcement campaign critical to its success. We welcome further discussion with the Council on this important issue."

Based on the resounding success of a pilot program, the County Executive's recommended FY05 budget proposes the purchase and distribution of 52,000 large capacity, wheeled recyclables containers. Silverman would more than double that number to fully implement this program in the coming fiscal year.

In a memo to other Councilmembers, Silverman urged the Council to consider a *one-time* \$11.00 per household increase in the solid waste fee, and the re-allocation of resources already included in the County Executive's recommended budget for recycling, to pay for these initiatives. In addition to these decisions, which will be made during the Council's deliberations on the FY05 Operating Budget, an amendment to the county's Solid Waste Management Plan will also be necessary.

A copy of the memorandum is attached.

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MEMORANDUM

March 22, 2004

TO: Councilmembers

FROM: Councilmember Steve Silverman

RE: Recycling Initiatives

As you have now seen, the County Executive has included several new Recycling activities in his recommended budget. I commend him for doing this, as the County is facing a very serious solid waste situation. As we will hear tomorrow, our failure to reach our recycling goals, has not only significant environmental consequences, but also financial ones. Our incinerator is operating at maximum capacity, and the transfer station is not far behind.

I appreciate the significant efforts of our colleagues on the Transportation and Environment Committee on this issue.

We are expecting to receive the Office of Legislative Oversight's study on Commercial Recycling at the end of April, and the proposed amended Solid Waste Management Plan shortly. However there are two initiatives that I believe should be considered within the context of the FY05 Operating Budget. One of these would also require an amendment to the Solid Waste Management Plan.

First, we should ban the disposal of cardboard. This will reduce the amount of materials being burned by the incinerator, and increase our recycling rate.

In 1994, the County implemented a ban on the disposal of yard trim through an amendment to the Solid Waste Management Plan. It was estimated that prior to the ban, 139,000 tons of yard trimmings and grass clippings were disposed of as trash each year. Current waste generation and composition data provided by the Division of Solid Waste, reveals that this ban has been effective at recovering 90% of these materials from the waste stream.

That same waste generation and composition data reveals that an estimated 50,000 tons of cardboard are being disposed of as waste (with the exception of food waste, cardboard made up the largest percentage of the waste sampled). By recovering 90% of those tons for recycling instead of needlessly burning them, we would reach a 41%

recycling rate. While this is still well below our goal of 50%, this one action would substantially increase our current recycling rate of 37%.

As with the yard trim ban, we expect a high degree of voluntary compliance. Residents and businesses who are already fully participating in our recycling programs will not have to undertake any new activities as a result of this ban. Those who have ignored the education and technical assistance offered by the Division of Solid Waste for the last ten years, and continue to throw away recyclable material, will find that their solid waste contractors are no longer permitted to haul away waste that includes cardboard.

While ours would be the first disposal ban in this region, bans have been implemented in many other communities such as San Diego County, CA, Seattle, WA, Dane County, WI, Orange County, NC, Halifax, Nova Scotia and the State of Massachusetts. Commonly, the ban is enforced at the transfer station where trained staff visually inspect a certain number of delivered loads. Haulers are subject to a penalty for any loads in which cardboard appears to exceed a set percentage. They are likely to pass that penalty back through to the violator, creating an opportunity for the hauler and their customer to work together to avoid future penalties. *The County would not be inspecting individual bags of garbage.*

The benefits of this initiative are clear: reducing the tonnage of waste burned at the incinerator, increasing our recycling rate, and (since cardboard is recycled as mixed paper) increasing the utilization of our contracted capacity with Office Paper Systems. The costs would include educational efforts, and enforcement personnel at the transfer station. We will have an opportunity to discuss the appropriate number of personnel with the Division of Solid Waste during our operating budget deliberations, however I believe that there may be opportunities within the budget for the Division of Solid Waste to re-allocate resources to offset these costs.

Second, I think you are all aware of the success of the residential Wheeled Toter program. In the pilot homes, these Wheeled Toters increased the collection of mixed paper between 40% and 95%. The savings realized by increase in recycled materials (assuming it otherwise would have been disposed of as solid waste) is estimated to offset the cost of the toters after 5 years. The County Executive's Recommended Budget includes \$1.8 million for an additional 52,000 toters,

I would like the Council to consider funding a full roll-out of this program in FY05. The Division of Solid Waste estimates that this would require an additional 63,000 toters at a cost of \$2.3 million, and would be paid for by a one-time increase in the residential solid waste fee of approximately \$11 per household.

I know of the Council's strong interest in substantially increasing our recycling rate, and I look forward to working with all of you on this important issue.